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ABSTRACT

This theme issue reports on a national survey to identify inclusive education programs for students with disabilities. First, chief state school officers were surveyed to identify local school districts where inclusion activities were taking place, including information about policy, funding, and evaluation. Next, districts identified were contacted and asked for information concerning their programs, including the sources of its initiation, the number and disabling conditions of the students involved, the nature of the inclusion program, changes in classroom practices and curriculum, consequences for staffing and school organization, parental involvement, evaluation activities undertaken, and materials developed. Preliminary findings indicate that inclusion programs are taking place in many both urban and rural districts in many states, that they are being initiated by various agents, that there is an emerging network of individuals and organizations involved, and that there is now a wide variety of materials on inclusive educational practices available. Seven factors necessary for restructuring and inclusion are identified: (1) visionary leadership, (2) collaboration, (3) refocussed use of assessment, (4) supports for staff and students, (5) funding, (6) effective parental involvement, and (7) models and classroom practices that support inclusion. A definition of inclusive education is also provided. (DB)

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National Survey on Inclusive Education

Inclusive education programs are being implemented across the nation — in large and small districts; in urban, suburban, and rural districts. In some instances, this is as part of a reform of special education, while in others it is integral with broader educational restructuring efforts.

These developments do not mean, of course, that inclusive education is the common practice in school systems across the country. It is not. Most of the five million students with disabilities receiving special education services continue to be educated in separate settings. The Fifteenth Annual Report to the Congress, from the Department of Education on the implementation of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), reports that 34 percent of students with handicapping conditions are educated in regular education settings, 35 percent in Resource Rooms, and 31 percent in special classes and more restrictive settings. Despite the addition of more than 1.2 million students since the passage of P.L. 94-142 in 1975, most with less severe handicapping conditions, this pattern has remained essentially unchanged since the initial implementation. In addition to a disproportionate percentage of students of color in special education programs, there is a concentration in those categories with more restrictive placements.

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI), The Graduate School and University Center, The City University of New York, has undertaken a national survey to identify inclusive education programs. Chief state school officers in each state were contacted and asked to identify local districts where inclusion activities were taking place, including information about policy, funding, and evaluation. Districts identified were then contacted and asked for information concerning their program, including the sources of its initiation, the number and handicapping conditions of the students involved, the nature of the inclusion program, changes in classroom practices and curriculum, consequences for staffing and school organization, parental involvement, evaluation activities undertaken, and materials developed.

While the analysis is not yet complete, a number of common factors are evident:

- ☐ inclusion programs are taking place across the country, in states such as Vermont, Oregon, Kentucky, North Dakota, Louisiana, New Mexico, Utah, Pennsylvania, and Washington;
- ☐ inclusion programs are taking place in a wide range of locations — in urban school districts such as Roanoke, Virginia; in suburban school districts such as Elkton, Maryland; and in rural school districts such as Earlton, Massachusetts;
- ☐ inclusion programs are being initiated by administrators, teachers, parents, university faculty, state education departments, and as a result of court orders;
- ☐ the evaluation of inclusion programs is taking place, addressing issues of implementation, outcomes, and financing, by individual districts, such as Shawnee Mission, Kansas; statewide in Massachusetts; and nationally

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through the Center for Special Education Finance;

- ☐ there is an emerging network of individuals and organizations involved in inclusive education practices;
- ☐ there is a wide variety of materials on inclusive education practices — for teachers, administrators, and parents. These include videos, printed material, and training materials.

Factors Necessary for Restructuring and Inclusion

Based upon the National Center's survey and review of the research, seven factors are necessary for inclusion to succeed:

1. Visionary Leadership: An Indiana superintendent, commenting about what is necessary for inclusion to succeed, said it only took two things: "leadership and money." As to leadership, three elements are critical:

1. a positive view about the value of education to students with disabilities. It is the application to students with disabilities of Ron Edmonds' assertion that "all children can learn";
2. an optimistic view of the capacity of teachers and schools to change and to accommodate the needs of all students; and
3. confidence that practices evolve, and that everyone benefits from inclusion.

Illustrative of this vision is the statement of a Vermont special education director:

"Some years ago we came to view inclusion as a subset of the restructuring of the entire educational system. From this perspective we no longer view special education as a means to help students meet the demands of the classroom, but rather as a part of the classroom services that must be available to accommodate the learning needs of all children in a restructured school."

2. Collaboration: Reports from school districts indicate that the achievement of inclusive education presumes that no one teacher can — or ought — be expected to have all the expertise required to meet the educational needs of all the students in the classroom. Rather, individual teachers must have available to them the support systems that provide collaborative assistance and which enable them to engage in cooperative problem solving. Building planning teams, scheduling of time for teachers to work together, recognition of teachers as problem solvers, conceptualizing teachers as front-line researchers — each of these are tools reported for necessary collaboration.

In Kentucky, for example, a state with a comprehensive educational restructuring effort, inclusion is incorporated as part of that redesign. Central is the collaborative teaching model which focuses on the delivery of the appropriate educational services within the general education classroom to all students. Kentucky defines collaborative teaching as a multidisciplinary approach (or team effort) to improve effective teaching skills through direct communication between professionals, shared responsibility for problem prevention and problem solving, and consistency in instructional service delivery for all students.

3. Refocussed Use of Assessment: Traditionally, student assessments have been used as screening devices — to determine who gets into which slot. In special education, there have been a myriad of studies as to the inadequacy of this screening. Inclusive education schools and districts report moving toward more "authentic assessment" designs, including the use of alternative measures of performance, attention to portfolios of student's work and performances, and generally working to refocus assessment. They report that assessment is used not just as a standardized measure but one that builds a greater understanding of the student and her or his needs. It is not used as a marker of teacher success or to measure one district's or building's performance against that of another.

4. Supports for Staff and Students: Two factors are reported for successful inclusive educational programs: systematic staff development and flexible planning time for special education and general education teachers to meet and work together.

A key factor in the planning process with teachers is the involvement of parents and, when possible, the student in the planning process.

From the vantage point of students, supports for inclusion often mean supplementary aids and support services. Districts report that these include: assignment of school aides, full- or part-time, short- or long-term; curriculum adaptation; provision of needed therapy services, integrated into the regular school program; peer support; "Buddy systems" or

"circles of friends"; effective use of computer-aided technology and other assistive devices.

5. Funding: The federally funded Center for Special Education Finance confirms earlier research, namely that the particular funding formula used by a state has consequence for student placement and inclusion. In most states, the funding formulas used to support special education encourage separate programs. Rather than supporting placement patterns, school districts reported wanting funding to follow students. In Vermont, for example, the changes in the funding formula were reported as an essential factor in their promotion of inclusive education for all students.

6. Effective Parental Involvement: Schools and districts conducting inclusion programs reported that, in the past, parental involvement had been more perfunctory than substantive, more a matter of honoring due process procedures than enhancing the educational experience. Inclusive schools report encouraging parental participation through family support services, as well as in the development of educational programs which engage parents as co-learners with their children. Programs that bring a wide array of services to children in the school setting report at least two sets of benefits — the direct benefits to the children and the opportunities provided for parents and other family members to become involved in school-based activities.

7. Models and Classroom Practices that Support Inclusion

Results of the national survey indicate that there are several models of inclusive education in terms of differing roles for teachers. These include:

☐ *a co-teaching model*, where the special education teacher co-teaches alongside the general education teacher;

☐ *parallel teaching*, where the special education teacher works with a small group of students from a selected special student population in a section of the general education classroom;

☐ *co-teaching consultant model*, where the special education teacher still operates a pull-out program, but also co-teaches within the general education classroom several hours a week;

☐ *a team model*, where the special education teacher teams up with one or more special education teachers to form a team, who are then together responsible for all of the children in the classroom or at a particular level; and

☐ *methods and resources teacher model*, where the special education teacher, whose students have been distributed in general classes, works with the general education teachers.

Classroom practices that have been reported as supporting inclusive education include:

Multi-level instruction, which is reported to allow for different kinds of learning within the same curriculum. Here there is a focus on key concepts to be taught, alternatives in presentation methods, willingness to accept varying types of student activities and acceptance of multiple outcomes, different ways in which students can express their learning, and diverse evaluation procedures.

Cooperative learning, which is reported to involve heterogeneous groupings of students, allowing for students with a wide variety of skills and traits to work together. Differing models of cooperative learning are reported as giving greater emphasis to the process of the group's work and to assessing outcomes for individual members as well as the team as a whole. Individual districts using cooperative learning declare that it promotes students planning and working together.

Activity-based learning gives emphasis to learning in natural settings, the production of actual work products, and assessment of student performance in terms of what they can do. It moves learning from being solely a classroom-based activity to encouraging and preparing students to learn in community settings.

Mastery learning focuses on the specifics of what a student is to learn and then allows sufficient opportunities for her/him to gain "mastery." Outcomes based education shares a similar focus on the results desired — what it is the student is to learn, but with a greater range of instructional modalities. Inclusive schools using mastery learning report attention to relearning, reteaching, and consideration of student's learning style(s).

Technology is often mentioned as being a support for students and teachers. This ranges from the use of computers to keep records on a large number of students across a range of activities, assistive devices such as reading machines and braille-to-print typewriters, as well as drill and instructional programs.

Peer support and tutoring programs are reported as having multiple advantages. Placing students in instructional roles enhances the teaching resources of the school. It is mentioned as positive for both the tutees and for the tutors. It recognizes that many students learn by teaching another student. Such programs place students at the center of the learning process.

Next Steps

There is no official definition of inclusive education that is used by states and districts. Inclusive education is most commonly understood as combining the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) principle with the appropriateness of the services provided. The National Center's working definition of inclusive education is:

"Providing to all students, including those with severe handicaps, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age-appropriate classes in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of the society."

Recently, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, Judith Heumann said, "The regular classroom in the neighborhood school should be the first option for students with disabilities. Administrators and teachers must receive the training and the help they need to make that the best option as well." According to the national survey, many administrators and teachers implementing inclusive education say that their colleagues are not opposed to inclusive education principles but express concern as to how the practices will be implemented to assure success for all students. Indeed, both supporters and critics of inclusive education programs are opposed to students being "dumped," that is, placed in regular education settings without sustained adequate services. Further, both groups are concerned that teachers will not receive sustained support and training. Some indicate the fear that inclusion is being implemented merely as a cost-saving measure. Others are unaware of the research that supports the benefits of inclusive education for both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

Other factors identified by survey respondents include:

- ☐ the scarcity of inclusive education programs at secondary levels;
- ☐ limited attention to the factors necessary for effective inclusion for students with particular disabilities;
- ☐ the lack of district and state-level data concerning the costs of the current system and of inclusion;
- ☐ inadequate recognition of the importance of staff development and curriculum adaptation;
- ☐ limited involvement of parents in program development and support;
- ☐ inadequate student and programmatic evaluation designs and measures;
- ☐ the lack of teacher training materials that address the needs of students with disabilities served in inclusive settings;
- ☐ the limitations of evaluation processes and development of inclusive education IEPs; and
- ☐ the absence of administrator and school board training.

Persons with information to add to the data base or who would like a copy of the completed report may contact NCERI.

National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI)

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion has been established to promote and support educational programs where all students are served effectively in inclusive settings. Toward this goal, the National Center:

- Addresses issues of national and local policy
- Disseminates information about programs, practices, evaluation, and funding
- Provides training and technical assistance
- Builds a network of inclusion districts
- Identifies individuals with expertise in inclusion
- Conducts research
- Infuses inclusion into educational restructuring.

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